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New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 40th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. TEIRLINCK (Belgium)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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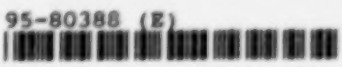

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK (A/49/241)

1. The CHAIRMAN drew Committee members' attention to document A/49/241 and said that the plenary Assembly would meet the following week in order to decide on a request for the inclusion of an additional item on the financing of the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in Rwanda in the agenda of the forty-ninth session. Pending action by the General Assembly, the Committee would not consider the question, which had been provisionally included under agenda item 107.

AGENDA ITEM 107: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1994-1995 (continued)

Revised estimates for conference services at Vienna (A/C.5/49/24 and A/49/7/Add.9)

2. Mr. TAKASU (Controller), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on revised estimates for conference services at Vienna (A/C.5/49/24), noted that the issue of a unified conference service had long been debated in the General Assembly. Under existing common services arrangements, the United Nations operated a joint meetings and interpretation service, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) operated a joint translation and documents service and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was responsible for library and printing/reproduction services. He referred to a number of documents on a unified conference service submitted by the Secretary-General in past years and to General Assembly resolutions urging the establishment of a single conference-servicing facility at Vienna as a measure to ensure cost-effectiveness and the most efficient use of scarce resources.

3. In its resolution 48/222 A (para. 8), the General Assembly had stressed the need for the establishment of unified conference services at Vienna and requested the Secretary-General to report on their establishment no later than at its forty-ninth session. Following the adoption of that resolution, significant progress had been achieved in the negotiations between the United Nations and UNIDO at the end of 1993, culminating in the adoption of a resolution by the General Conference of UNIDO at its fifth session (A/C.5/49/24, para. 5) concerning the transfer of administrative responsibility for conference services from UNIDO to the United Nations Office at Vienna. The United Nations and UNIDO would sign an agreement on the transfer once it was approved by the General Assembly.

4. The two-part proposal set forth in the report of the Secretary-General concerned both conference and library services, Vienna (sect. 25 E of the programme budget) and the administrative services of the United Nations Office at Vienna (sect. 25 I). Drawing attention to table 2, he noted that, currently, 68 staff members at the United Nations Office at Vienna were responsible for meeting and interpretation services and 128 UNIDO staff members were responsible for translation and documents. The Secretary-General proposed to transfer the

128 UNIDO staff members to the United Nations staffing table and to convert 40 posts from temporary assistance for meetings, listed in the table under "Changes proposed" to established posts at no additional cost.

5. Administrative support to the United Nations Office at Vienna would have to be strengthened in order to incorporate the approximately 200 additional conference service staff members. Referring to table 1, he noted that the 1994-1995 appropriation under section 25 E was $34.7 million and that the transfer of the UNIDO staff members would cost $6.9 million. However, those costs would be offset by an increase of $7.2 million in income. Taking into account the related administrative costs of the personal transfer under section 25 I ($577,300), the total net cost of the changes proposed would be $324,100. The Secretary-General had hoped that the unified conference service would become operational on 1 January 1995. Since action by the General Assembly had been deferred to the resumed session, the new target date for implementing the changes was 1 April 1995.

6. The Advisory Committee was of the view that since the administration of the United Nations Office at Vienna had been allotted 6 additional Professional posts and 25 additional General Service posts in the biennium 1994-1995, it did not need to be strengthened further. He wished to point out that those additional posts had been necessary in order for the United Nations to perform work in such areas as payroll, procurement, programming and inventory control which UNIDO had been doing for it in exchange for payment. The posts authorized in 1994-1995 would not be sufficient to handle the personnel and other administrative procedures necessary to accommodate the transfer of additional staff.

7. Referring to the Advisory Committee recommendation that a unified conference service must be financed from within existing resources under budget sections 25 E and 25 I (A/49/7/Add.9, para. 8), he said that the Secretary-General would need the authority to enter into commitments in excess of the existing appropriation for conference services for 1994-1995.

8. Mr. PATTERSON (Director of the Interpretation, Meetings and Documentation Division) said that a unified conference service at Vienna would yield significant benefits in both the immediate and longer term. First, obsolete text-processing equipment at Vienna would be replaced with modern equipment comparable to the equipment used at Headquarters and at the United Nations Office at Geneva. That would create a global translation service, facilitating the distribution of work among the three duty stations and ensuring the full utilization of each duty station's capacity.

9. Second, administration of the translation staff by the United Nations would clarify the status of staff members who had been on special secondment to UNIDO since 1986. That uncertain situation had made it difficult to replace translators at Vienna as vacancies arose. He noted that the higher-than-normal vacancy rate at UNIDO had affected the translation services. The ability to fill vacant translation posts more readily would reduce the requirement for temporary assistance and would ultimately result in savings, since established posts were less costly than temporary posts. An earlier proposal to use temporary assistance resources in order to establish additional translation

posts - at an estimated savings of approximately $1 million per year - had not been included in the current revised budget estimates in order to allow time to observe how the unified conference service would function. The quality of translation services was expected to improve under the new global arrangement, as the translators at Vienna would have access to the training and guidance provided by the United Nations.

10. Lastly, the cost of conference servicing would become more transparent. In the past, it had been difficult to compare the United Nations and UNIDO budgets and, thus, to obtain a clear and complete picture of conference-servicing costs.

11. He hoped that the new arrangement would be implemented as of 1 April 1995.

12. Ms. ROTHEISER (Austria) noted that the General Assembly had long desired a unified conference service at Vienna and expressed regret that it could not be implemented on 1 January 1995. It was also regrettable that the Advisory Committee had not seen the merit of a conversion of posts which would be cost-neutral and might even result in savings. While it always favoured efficient use of scarce resources, her delegation believed that the modest additional net resources proposed were justified by an increase in workload which could not be handled within existing resources. It fully supported the proposals of the Secretary-General.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.